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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 001510

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SUBJECT: FRENCH DISCUSS OSCE ISSUES WITH RUSSIAN DIPLOMAT

REF: PARIS 579

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

1. (C) Summary: Following a meeting March 7 with Alexander Grushko, Director of the Russian MFA's European Cooperation Department, A/S-equivalent for Security Affairs Philippe Carre told POL M/C he believed the Russians may understand they had gone too far in their efforts to diminish the OSCE, and that they were looking for ways to be more reasonable. This contrasted with a harder line taken regarding the "frozen conflicts," with Grushko reprising a comparison first raised with the French in mid-January bilateral consultations; namely, that an independent Kosovo would likely lead to Abkhazian independence from Georgia and Transnistrian independence from Moldova. End summary.

CARRE: RUSSIANS LOOKING TO COMPROMISE ON THE OSCE

2. (C) Carre told POL M/C that, in general, his morning meeting with Grushko was a "good exchange," and that he inferred from the meeting that Russia had sensed it had gone too far in bashing the OSCE. However, Carre said it was unclear how far and how quickly the Russians might move to correct course. Carre planned on visiting Moscow in 4-6 weeks to discuss these issues further.

3. (C) Carre opened the meeting by saying that the OSCE remained an important and vital institution to European security. It was a unique instrument, said Carre, the only one where everyone was a stakeholder. He then focused on two major issues of concern to the French regarding the OSCE and Russia. First was Russia's efforts to reduce its contributions to the budget and to separate the administrative and operational budgets in order to feed the former and starve the latter. Carre told Grushko that the Russians were the only ones refusing to pay their assessments and asked whether Russia would be willing to accept the reduced influence commensurate with their demands to pay only 1.9% of the budget. Would Russia want only 1.9% of the OSCE's influence, given the U.S.'s contributions of 34% of the budget, Carre asked. Russia has complained about under-representation in the OSCE secretariat and minimum staffing, yet such a minimal contribution would mean Russia would receive significantly fewer spots for its nationals in the OSCE administration.

4. (C) The second major point Carre raised concerned Russian efforts to dilute the power and decision-making authority of OSCE election monitoring missions to write and issue reports. Carre told Grushko that the Russian proposal to transfer election report-authoring to the Permanent Council was a nonstarter, but that the French were willing to discuss ways to clarify existing rules on election monitoring and OSCE governance. Carre also replied to standard Russian criticism that the OSCE was unfairly focused on the Eastern part of Europe by saying that the OSCE had raised numerous issues of concern to Western European countries, such as anti-Semitism, the status of women and hate speech. Grushko responded with familiar talking points on Russian concerns. In reply to a proposal that OSCE reform discussions continue in capitals with the UK, Germany and the US, Grushko said the Russians preferred to keep such talks in Vienna.

RUSSIANS RECONCILED TO FRENCH OSCE SG CANDIDATE

5. (C) Carre said that the Russians were reconciled to the OSCE Secretary General candidacy of Frenchman Marc Perrin de Brichambaut. The Russians understand that they will get the Economic Coordinator position as part of a package. Carre said a strong candidate like Brichambaut would reinvigorate the body, and signal that the major players are ready to reinvest politically in the organization. According to French calculations, Carre said, 38 OSCE member countries support Brichambaut; the organization was near consensus, with the only important holdouts being Austria and Switzerland. At some point it would be important to emphasize to those two countries, Carre told POL M/C, that they were blocking consensus.

GRUSHKO HARD-LINE ON FORMER SOVIET SPACE ISSUES

6. (C) Although Grushko appeared open to compromise on the OSCE, Carre said the Russian diplomat was predictably tough on the frozen conflicts, particularly Moldova/Transnistria.

Grushko raised both in comparison with Kosovo, and told Carre that moves towards independence by Kosovo would inevitably influence the separatist regions of Abkhazia and Transnistria. Regarding Moldova, Grushko flatly stated that the Kozak plan was the only starting point for discussion. On Georgia and border monitoring, Grushko said OSCE training of Georgian border guards would not be a problem, as long as that training was not along the border. Carre inferred that the Russians were looking at a proposed EU border mission in a positive light, largely because the U.S. would not have a presence.

Leach